

# How to Start a Home Vegetable Garden – Benefits & Saving Money



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I love gardening. Every spring I start dreaming of all the veggies I'm going to plant, and I love going to my local farmers' market and picking out tomatoes, cucumbers, and field peas to plant.

Have *you* ever thought about starting a home garden?

With [food prices rising](#) and more people trying to save money due to the economy, home gardening has taken off in a big way in recent years. Many vegetable seed companies report sales have shot up 30-50%, which is a clear indicator that more people are putting on their gardening gloves and getting to work.

Home gardening is a hobby that can bring great joy to your life, enable you to get some free exercise, and bring the entire family together. Although it may not sound exciting on the surface, it's something you should consider if you enjoy the outdoors and are interested in reaping the rewards of hard work.

## Benefits of Home Gardening

So, still wondering if home gardening is right for you? Wondering if a home garden can really save you money? First, let's look at the benefits of starting a home garden.

### 1. Home Gardening Is Versatile

Some people think they need a huge yard to have their own garden, but nothing could be further from the truth. No matter how much space you have, you can always find room for a few plants. This is true even if you live in an apartment or only have a small porch. All you need is a [DIY](#) attitude and a bit of creativity.

Case in point: you'd laugh if you saw my backyard. Its picture is next to the word "tiny" in the dictionary. But last year I grew a bumper crop of tomatoes, climbing peas, and several other wonderful veggies in my little space – all using some creative techniques I'll talk about in just a bit.

So, don't think that because you don't have a ton of space you can't grow a garden. Home gardening can be really versatile, and easy to get into!

### 2. Home Gardening Relieves Stress

I find gardening to be a very soothing hobby. Digging in the dirt and watching my veggies grow a bit every day is incredibly rewarding.

Gardening is a wonderful activity to relieve stress. You're outdoors, you're getting exercise, and best of all, the activity often takes your mind off work and other stress in your life. I know it does for me!

### 3. Home Gardening Is a Family Activity

For some, gardening is a solo activity. But this doesn't have to be the case. Why not ask your spouse and/or children to give you a hand in the garden? You may be surprised by how much fun you can all have together. Finding fun activities for the whole family to participate in can be tough and we often resort to spending a bunch of money to have fun, but working in a garden together costs nothing.

Another thing to consider is that due to steep budget cuts, more and more cities are closing their community pools and cutting [public library services and resources](#). If you and your kids rely on city perks like these for your summer fun, you might be twiddling your thumbs this year. I know several pools in my own community won't be open, and my local library is cutting back their hours to try and save money.

Your kids might love helping you grow veggies in the garden, so this can be an inexpensive alternative to consider.

### 4. Home Gardens Save Money

For many people, this is the number one reason to start a garden. Burpee Seed Co. estimates that for every \$50 a family spends on seeds and fertilizer, they'll reap \$1,250 in produce. Amazing!

If [saving money on fruits and vegetables](#) is your end goal, make sure you plant seeds for things you'll actually enjoy eating. Some of the most popular options include tomatoes, green peppers, banana peppers, and zucchini.

I've never estimated how much money I save with my own garden. My first year starting seeds I lost my entire crop because I didn't know what I was doing and overwatered. Last year, I lost half my crop and had to start over. So there will most likely be failures and successes, but that's part of the fun.

However, you *can* maximize the money you save by being smart about what you grow. For instance, cool weather crops like carrots, potatoes, onions, and winter squash can be stored for quite a long time. When these vegetables are harvested, you can easily store them in your basement for several weeks, or even months, if you keep them packed in sawdust. So even if you can't eat them right away, they'll keep long enough for you to use them up over time.

Other vegetables, like tomatoes, peas, cucumbers, and beets are easy to preserve with [home canning](#) or freezing.

A good rule of thumb is to look at the vegetables you're buying at the store already. For instance, I eat a ton of kale and spinach, so these are two crops I always try to grow at home. I also love green beans, so every year I make my own homemade Dilly Beans, and can them myself.

## 5. You Can Grow Your Own Herbs and Spices

You probably already know that herbs are really expensive to buy in the store. Growing rosemary, basil, oregano, and other herbs and spices in your garden is a great way to save some money and diversify your crop.

Herbs are usually my biggest crop every year, and I always find a use for what I grow.

For instance, I have several lavender bushes in my yard. I dry the lavender, make lavender infused [olive oil](#) and lavender shortbread cookies, and even sprinkle dried lavender in my carpets. I'm also getting into soapmaking (a great [green small business idea](#)), so I'll have plenty of lavender to use in my homemade soaps.

I also grow a lot of parsley, which I sprinkle on potatoes and use to make homemade tabbouleh.

Keep in mind that even if you can't use your herbs fresh right now, you can always dry them and use them over the next several months. This can save you money because you won't need to buy these dried herbs at the grocery store.

## 6. Home Gardens Are Green and Sustainable

[Buying natural organic food](#) is expensive, but often desired due to all of the chemicals and genetic altering done by farmers nowadays. Growing your own fruits and vegetables is the most organic you can get! You'll be helping the environment *and* saving money at the same time.

You can also save money and help your garden be more organic by creating your own compost at home. For instance, I have my own [vermicomposting](#) bin, which means I compost my food scraps with worms. It may sound gross, but worms are amazing at breaking down food and turning it into thick, rich compost.

This compost is very expensive if you buy it at the store. The same is true for liquid fertilizer, which my worms also produce for me. The best part is that, for me, these garden essentials are 100% free, and I'm lessening my impact on the environment by keeping all my [food waste](#) out of the landfill.





# How to Start a Home Garden

If you've never started a garden, you might be tempted to run out to Home Depot and buy a ton of seeds, dirt, and fertilizer.

Let me say this now: don't do it. At least, not yet. There are cheaper ways to get into home gardening!

## Step 1: Look at Your Sun Availability

First, look at your yard. Where do you get the most sun? How much sun does each area get?

One of my biggest mistakes when I started gardening was assuming that my garden needed 8 hours of sun every day. Thanks to my partly shady yard, this kept me from gardening for many years. But the truth is that many vegetables grow very well in part shade; that is, if they get at least 3 hours of sun, or consistent dappled sun, throughout the day.

What grows well in part shade? Here's a list of 10 types of vegetables to get you started:

- Salad Greens, such as leaf lettuce, arugula, endive, and cress.
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Peas
- Beets
- Brussels Sprouts
- Radishes
- Swiss Chard
- Leafy Greens, such as collards, mustard greens, spinach, and kale
- Beans

These 6 vegetables, on the other hand, grow best in full sun:

- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Eggplant
- Peppers
- Squash
- Corn

You can save money on your vegetables by purchasing them from independent farmers and nurseries, or starting seeds yourself. Big chain stores like Home Depot and Lowes usually have the most expensive prices on these plants.

## Step 2: Look at Your Space

Now look at the land or space you have to work with. Remember, you don't need a lot of space to grow a garden!

If you're working with limited space (like me), then you'll want to consider two options: container gardening, and vertical gardening.

### Container Gardening

Thanks to my tiny backyard, I have to think small. So I always use container gardening. I have pots of tomatoes and herbs sitting on my back patio right now. And, they're doing great!

You can save a lot of money on your containers by shopping at [garage sales](#). And, don't limit your search to traditional terra cotta pots! For instance, you can grow herbs and greens in chipped teapots and vintage olive oil cans (as long as you put sand or stones at the bottom for drainage). These containers can be picked up for a song at garage sales or thrift stores, and have a lot more character than traditional terra cotta pots or plastic pots!

### Vertical Gardening

I also go vertical; instead of planting a garden *out* (like a traditional garden in the ground, which requires far more land), I go *up*.

For instance, you can attach rain gutters to the side of your house and plant shallow crops, like lettuce and herbs, in them. You can use canvas hanging shoe organizers off your patio for shallow crops – for instructions, check out [how it's done](#). You can build outdoor shelving and have several layers of pots on your deck. You can use your backyard fence to grow climbing veggies like peas and cucumbers.

There are tons of creative (and frugal) ways to plant fruits and vegetables in your yard. And, going vertical is a great option if you don't have a lot of space.

If you do have some extra land to work with, you'll be able to plant your veggies right in the ground. You'll first need to rip up the grass (or whatever plants are currently growing there) and till the soil, making it nice and loose for the vegetables you'll be planting.

You'll probably also want to put up some kind of fencing to keep rabbits, squirrels, and deer out. This doesn't have to be expensive; even chicken wire will work.

## Step 3: Consider Your Watering Needs

How are you going to water your garden? Is the site you've selected easily accessed by your water hose?

It's important to analyze how you're going to water your garden before you plant it. And, now is a good time to seriously consider investing in a rain barrel. I have two, and they are essential in the summer months for keeping my garden well watered.

## **Step 4: Plant Your Garden**

Once you've analyzed your light, selected a site, and prepared the garden, you can now start planting!

Make sure you give your plants a drink of water before you stick them in the garden; this wets the root ball and makes it less likely they'll go into shock when you transplant them.

Your garden will likely need water at least twice a week. Of course, this depends on how much rain you get, and what you've planted. Research the plants you're growing so you're informed on how much water they need. As a rule, it's best to water either early in the morning or later in the evening; watering during the afternoon can actually burn your plants.

## **More Home Gardening Tips:**

- Try starting seeds from scratch rather than buying established plants from a store. You'll save a ton of money this way, although this does require more work.
- Don't waste money buying peat pots or other seed starting kits. Check with your local nursery; they likely have a ton of black plastic pots and plant trays they'd be happy to give you. You can also use egg cartons and plastic cups to start seeds in (that's what I use).
- Visit your local farmers' market to look for fruit and veggie plants. You'll not only support families instead of a big corporate store, but you'll also save a ton of money. For instance, I can buy a basil plant at Home Depot for \$3.50, or buy the same plant at my local farmers' market for just \$1.
- Don't waste money buying garden labels (i.e. the plastic spikes you write on and then stick into the ground to identify your plants). Cut up a plastic milk carton and use a black Sharpie instead!
- If you have a problem with birds and rodents eating your veggies, cut up an old garden hose into three or four foot segments. Animals will often mistake these for snakes, and steer clear of your garden. You could even get your kids involved by having them paint the hoses to look even more like snakes.





## Final Word

Do any of you have your own garden? If so, do you have any additional advice for those who are interested in getting started?

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